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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis, and Administration

November 14, 2003

Mr. Gabriel Lozano
Office of Congressman Henry Bonilla
11120 Wurzbach
Suite 300
San Antonio, TX 78230

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 34284 – Southwest Gulf Railroad Company –
Construction and Operation Exemption – Medina County, TX

Dear Mr. Lozano:

As you know, the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is conducting an environmental review of Southwest Gulf Railroad Company's (SGR) proposed rail construction and operation in Medina County, Texas, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act and related environmental regulations, including the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f (NHPA).

Thank you for expressing interest in participating as a consulting party to the section 106 process of NHPA. We are pleased to add your office to the list of official section 106 consulting parties and will make sure that you receive all subsequent correspondence regarding the section 106 process for this proceeding.

I have enclosed a copy of SEA's Preliminary Cultural Resources Assessment report for your review. After consulting with the Texas Historical Commission (THC) and identifying appropriate consulting parties to the section 106 process of NHPA, SEA issued this report to the identified consulting parties for review and comment. Some of these parties had indicated that they had information about cultural or historic properties in the area of the proposed project, and we believed that preparing and providing the consulting parties with the report would ensure their participation and input from the outset of the section 106 process, as well as provide us with the opportunity to gather additional information from knowledgeable sources. As stated on page 3 of the report, the report is intended to serve as a starting point for the section 106 consultation for SGR's proposed project.

The report sets forth the SEA's preliminary findings and recommendations based on SEA's studies to date. Chapter 1 briefly describes the proposed action and alternatives. Chapter 2 contains a cultural context overview of the proposed project area by providing a summary of the prehistory and history of Medina County and a brief discussion of known and potential

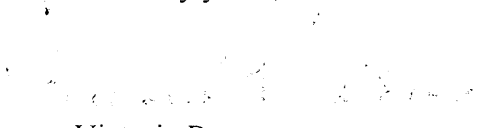
historic resources located in the areas of potential effects. Chapter 3 discusses the results of SEA's initial studies, and includes SEA's opinion of the project's potential effects on historic properties and preliminary recommendations for treatment and/or mitigation.

I have also enclosed copies of the cover letters transmitting the report to the identified consulting parties, as well as the results of a vibration study and the cover letters transmitting the vibration study to the consulting parties. In response to these mailings, SEA has received eight comment letters to date, including a letter from THC. These comment letters will be made available to the public on our website in the near future.¹ The comment letters identify additional parties that should be included as official section 106 consulting parties; if you know of other potential consulting parties, please let us know.

SEA is currently working on preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) document for SGR's proposed project. The EA will contain more detailed information regarding SGR's proposed project as well as the results of SEA's preliminary environmental review of the proposed project and potential environmental impacts. This document will include the Preliminary Cultural Resources Assessment report, comments received regarding the report, and any additional information regarding cultural and historic resources or the section 106 process for this proceeding. A press release will be issued to announce the availability of the EA.

We look forward to working with you throughout the environmental review process and the section 106 process for this proceeding and to receiving comments from you and your office. If you have any questions regarding the enclosed information, the section 106 process, or the environmental review process, please do not hesitate to contact me or Rini Ghosh of my staff at (202) 565-1539.

Sincerely yours,


Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

Enclosures

¹ To access these documents via the internet, please go to www.stb.dot.gov, select "Environmental Issues," and then select "Environmental Correspondence."